

SPORTS AND LEISURE

Oldtimer hockey tournament results

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Referees' association remains as popular as ever No shortage of 'zebras' here

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Staff Writer

At a time when many communities across Canada are experiencing a shortage of on-ice officials, the Georgetown Hockey Referees' Association holds tryouts each year to supply local youth hockey groups with their zebra-striped overseers.

It's the only paid position in minor hockey, but after listening to both veteran officials and rookie teens in the 85-member Georgetown organization, financial gain doesn't appear to be a motivating factor for taking up a part-time job that requires sharp eyes, good skating ability and skin made of burlap.

"Why do I do it? For one, the exercise. I do enjoy getting out and skating and keeping active in hockey," said 40-year-old Dan Smith of Acton, one of about 10 adults in the GHRA. "I also enjoy the kids—that's first and foremost. Yes, there is criticism of officials and sometimes it's warranted, but for the most part things run smoothly."

Twenty-eight of the referee/linesmen prospects who took part in the September tryouts will attempt to earn their Ontario Minor Hockey Association certification at a clinic in Georgetown this Sunday that is filled to capacity. The minimum age to become an official is 14, but there are a couple of 50-something members still working the front lines.

Hockey Canada's 'New Game' guidelines that were introduced last fall apparently haven't scared off potential sign-ups, either, as this year's membership is one of the largest in the local organization's history. Over 32,000 officials are registered with Hockey Canada.

GHRA referee-in-chief Bob DeZeeuw, who's been involved with the local group for the past dozen years, said that there's usually a large



Yes, even the guys and girls wearing pinstripes require practice and several new members of the Georgetown Hockey Referees' Association were put through their paces in the organization's annual tryouts. There are currently about 85 officials in the local association and over 32,000 certified referees and linesmen across the country. Photo by Eamonn Maher

turnover each fall and despite the relatively lower pay compared to most part-time employment, the recruits keep coming. He noted that the New Game directives have been well received for the most part, games are faster-paced and take less time to play.

"The new four-year high school rule really hurt us because we had 15 guys go away to university this year and they accounted for a lot of games worked every week," added DeZeeuw, who makes the schedule nearly a month in advance for the 80 to 90 weekly assignments.

"Usually they start at 14, do two years of house league and then get certified to officiate rep games. We do have tryouts every year but we rarely ever cut anyone."

Fourteen-year-old Tyler Shippel admits he's got an ulterior motive for wanting to become an official. A member of Georgetown's major bantam AA Raiders, Shippel figures more time on the blades will result an improvement in his skating and overall knowledge of the game.

"I reffed soccer before for a year and I really enjoyed it," he said. "I love hockey too so I decided it would be a good part-time job and I could help out the kids learn about fair play."

Georgetown has a tradition of producing top-level officials for the pro ranks as both Bryan Lewis and the late John McCauley served in the position of National Hockey League director of officiating, while McCauley's son Wes has become a full-time National Hockey League referee in the past couple of years.

Lewis founded the organization 50 years ago and the anniversary was recognized as part of Georgetown's Homecoming festivities in late July.

The GHRA currently has a mentorship program in which veteran officials are paired with teenagers and it isn't uncommon for an OMHA supervisor to drop by and provide an evaluation of a game in the referees' room afterward.

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Dan Smith, a senior official with the Georgetown Hockey Referees' Association, oversees some prospective recruits during a recent tryout at the Mold-Masters SportsPlex. The former Northern Ontario Hockey Association and current Level 3 official said that the occasional barb from the stands doesn't bother him and his 20 years of refereeing have been very rewarding. Photo by Eamonn Maher



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